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The individuality of a person in the context of digitalization: an overview of modern research and approaches

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Abstract

Context and relevance. In the context of pronounced civilizational changes associated with the processes of globalization, digitalization, accompanied by socio-cultural changes in the values structure, education, and the specifics of communication, the relevance of the problem of preserving and developing human individuality is increasing. **Objective** of the review is to identify the facts of the positive and negative impact of digitalization on the process of developing the individuality of children and adolescents. **Method.** Analysis and synthesis of data presented in scientific publications devoted to the study of this topic. **Conclusions**. With uncertain, insufficiently researched socio-psychological and socio-cultural consequences of digitalization, there is a high probability of destructuralization of the main spheres of human life, loss of his individuality and subjectivity in relation to the social, socio-cultural and subject environment. In particular, it was found that children and adolescents at risk of digital addiction have problems related to the deformation of the Self-image and its boundaries, communication problems, value-semantic and emotional-volitional, cognitive changes, relatively more pronounced features that can be interpreted as a violation of the integrity of individuality. To prevent such changes, special work is important, anticipating the introduction of digitalization in education.

Keywords: individuality, children, adolescents, civilizational changes, globalization, digitalization, digital environment, digital addiction, features of children and adolescents at risk of digital addiction, development of individuality and subjectivity

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Индивидуальность человека в условиях цифровизации: обзор современных исследований и подходов

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. В условиях выраженных цивилизационных изменений, связанных с процессами глобализации, цифровизации, сопровождающимися социокультурными изменениями в системе ценностей, в образовании, специфике коммуникаций, возрастает актуальность проблемы сохранения и развития индивидуальности человека. **Цель** обзора — выявление фактов позитивного и негативного влияния цифровизации на процесс развития индивидуальности детей и подростков. **Метод**. Анализ и обобщение данных, представленных в научных публикациях, посвященных изучению данной темы. **Выводы.** При неопределенных, недостаточно исследованных социально-психологических и социокультурных последствиях диджитализации велика вероятность деструктурализации основных сфер жизни человека, утраты его индивидуальности и субъектности в отношении социальной, социокультурной и предметной среды. В частности, установлено, что у детей и подростков с риском цифровой зависимости имеются проблемы, связанные с деформацией образа Я и его границ, коммуникативные проблемы, ценностно-смысловые и эмоционально-волевые, когнитивные изменения, относительно более выражены особенности, которые можно интерпретировать как нарушение целостности индивидуальности. Для предотвращения таких изменений важна особая работа, предваряющая внедрение цифровизации в образование.

Ключевые слова: индивидуальность, дети, подростки, цивилизационные изменения, глобализация, цифровизация, цифровая среда, цифровая зависимость, особенности детей и подростков с риском цифровой зависимости, развитие индивидуальности и субъектности

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Introduction

The modern world is changing rapidly in technological, social and spiritual terms. The system of values that is significant to individuals is transforming, and lifestyles and living conditions are becoming standardized. It also affects a person's personality: they gradually lose the unique character traits and individuality that make them who they are. The problem of developing individuality in conditions that contribute to its disintegration (deindividualization) has been identified by a number of renowned domestic and foreign psychologists, such as G. Le Bon, E. Fromm, R. Ziller, F. Zimbardo, A.V. Petrovsky, G.M. Andreeva, V.I. Slobodchikov, E.I. Isaev, V.V. Zenkovsky, S. Frank, etc., and is becoming more and more relevant. Different researchers point to various factors as determinants of the disintegration of individuality. These include the power of the crowd, which begins to act as an independent subject, subordinating the personality; the refusal to take responsibility for actions, especially in virtual communication; underdeveloped self-awareness and reflection, including a lack of need for them; and the need to belong to a group and receive its approval. The processes of deindividualization are caused by the global socio-anthropological crisis, which manifests at an individual level as infantilism, aggressiveness, limitations, a need for stimulation and an inability to concentrate (Frolova, 2013; The Age of Digital Interdependence, 2019, etc.). Researchers studying personality and individuality have noted that deindividualization is currently more intense. This raises the question of what causes the loss of individuality in modern socio-cultural conditions, and how and to what extent individuality can develop and exist in these conditions (Bolshunova, Ustinova, 2024; Frolova, 2013; Rezvitsky, 2019).

Individuality in the context of digitalization: an exploration of the issues

The problem of individuality and its development has traditionally been of interest to Russian psychologists. Works by B.G. Ananyev, E.A. Golubeva, V.S. Merlin and other differential psychologists present research on individuality, which contains personal, psychological and subjective content (Ananyev, 1968; Merlin, 1986; Golubeva, 2005; Kabardov, 2020; Bolshunova, Ustinova, 2024). In domestic psychology, the understanding of individuality, where personality acts as one of its substructures, is historically conditioned.[1] Due to historical circumstances, Christian (Orthodox) psychology largely dominated Russian psychology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, Christian psychology is characterized by an appeal to the individual soul. This is because the soul is immortal, in communion with God, and able to take responsibility for what happens in one's life and in the world. It is also worth noting the views of the Russian philosopher, theologian, psychologist, and educator V.V. Zenkov, who defines individuality as the "spiritual core of a person or personality" and "a living, creative force that determines psychological development" (Zenkov, 1996, p. 195). Similar positions are presented in the works of N.O. Lossky, P. Florensky, and S. Frank. (Lossky, 2000; Florensky, 2001; Frank, 2007). In religious and philosophical anthropology, deindividualization is caused by alienation from God (Frank, 2007; Hoblick, 2014). This entails detaching from one's own personality, resulting in a loss of subjectivity and the ability to distinguish between the self and others. It also manifests as susceptibility to manipulation, an undeveloped sense of self and a lack of reflection. Historically, interest in individuality and its origins has also

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[1] Psychology was permanently taught in ecclesiastical educational institutions, while its teaching, together with philosophy, was restricted to a greater or lesser extent at different times in secular ones.

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been a characteristic of the natural-scientific approach to Russian psychology. (Lazursky, 1997; Pavlov, 1954; Ukhtomsky, 2002)[2].

The tradition of researching holistic individuality — integrating individual, personal, subjective and spiritual principles — continues to thrive in the schools of B G. Ananyev, B.M. Teplov, and V.S. Merlin. It is important to note that, in most Russian schools of differential psychology, individuality is not reduced to a set of qualities (biological, social, psychological, personal, etc.) that distinguish one person from another. Rather, it is understood as the unique combination of these qualities that make up a person's identity and individuality. Despite the significant contributions of W. Stern, F. Galton, A. Anastasi and others to the emergence of foreign differential psychology, personality psychology (or personology, as represented by G. Murray, S. Maddy, etc.) is more widely recognized. In this field, individuality is considered to be one of the aspects of personality. Moreover, foreign differential psychology focuses more on peculiarities and variability, and on listing differences, than on integrity and uniqueness.

Thus, in Russian differential psychology, individuality is regarded as the "core of a person" (Zenkovsky, 1996), integrating individual, personality and subject parameters (Ananyev, 1968; Merlin, 1986; Golubeva, 2005).

We understand individuality as the integrity and uniqueness of a person, implemented through the choice, design, and implementation of their life path. This development involves ascending to subjectivity (to oneself, one's authenticity) at each stage of age development, as well as an ascent to socio-cultural samples, in which the spiritual component is represented (Bolshunova, Ustinova, 2024). In B. M. Teplov's (1961) opinion, research into individuality was the most

important area of scientific psychology. In these changed socio-cultural conditions, the question of individuality and the understanding of how it develops becomes particularly important.

One such crucial change is globalization, characterized by multi-vector civilizational processes such as the unification of human development and the accentuation of ethno-cultural and national specialness. These processes also entail the degradation of subjectivity, the loss of meaning and the loss of meaning-making (Astafieva, Flier, 2013; Bolshunov, Tyurikov, Bolshunova, 2020; Korytyna, 2016; Sloterdijk, 2010). The unification processes, when accompanied by appropriate conditions such as regulation in the spheres of language, culture, life norms and values, can lead to depersonalization, the loss of cultural and individual uniqueness and specialness. This is because they are accompanied by the same phenomena within the framework of a limited 'we'.

Cultural scientists believe that spiritual life is the aspect of culture that is most resistant to aggressive globalization. Self-identity is based on cultural uniqueness, which is enshrined in language, mentality, experience and behavior. However, it is this sphere that is subject to aggressive influence, making use of all the possibilities offered by internet communications and spreading the trendy concepts of the modern person's image.

The effects of globalization are being exacerbated by two factors: digitalization and the pressure of information. The digital transformation of all aspects of society, including education, is inevitable. The technological paradigm shift affecting all areas of life, including the economy, industry, medicine, entertainment, and art, requires corresponding changes in education. However, the total digitalization of all

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[2] This includes ideas about character and its structure developed by A.F. Lazursky in the context of exo- and endopsychic relations; A.A. Ukhtomsky's research into the neurodynamic foundations of the phenomenon of "dominance in another", which describes the possibility of dialogical relations between the self and others; and I.P. Pavlov's research into the neurophysiological prerequisites of temperament and abilities.

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activities, especially those involving children, is already having an adverse psychological and sociocultural impact, as it tends to be carried out carelessly and ignorantly.[3] The risks associated with digitalization, in the broader context of this phenomenon (including informatization, virtualization, digital transformation, etc.), are not limited to legal issues such as security, privacy, information overload, etc. The emergence of a new digital environment poses more serious challenges to human life (Auzan, 2019[4]; Krupennikova, Kurbatov, 2014; The Age of Digital Interdependence, 2019; Mattern, 2021; Squires & Johnson, 2020, etc.). According to Internet World Stats, the number of internet users has increased rapidly, from 2.8 billion in 2014 to an estimated 5.6 billion in 2024. At the same time, however, humanity is not ready to face this new reality. New phenomena are emerging that need to be conceptualized in terms of their significance and impact on culture and human development. For example, there is Linguistics 2.0 (communication from keyboard to screen) and Special Communication (communication 2.0), which is characterized by the language of hostility, liberation and irresponsibility, and a lack of sensitivity to the distinction between public and intimate matters (Goroshko, 2016). Existence in the virtual world is such that self-determination and concern about authenticity are unnecessary. In fact, it is preferable to have multiple selves "scattered" across different blogs, avatars, nicknames, etc. In the digital realm, there's no requirement to be your authentic self, take responsibility, or explore the limits of your identity.

Several researchers believe that the behavioral model implemented in digital realm can easily be transferred to communication and interaction with others in real life (Fortunatov, Bokova, Egorov, 2014). This results in the same type of facilitated, superficial and irresponsible communication being actualised.

Those studying the "new digital reality", including philosophers, culturologists, political scientists, linguists, educators and psychologists, have mixed attitudes towards the consequences of digitalization. These range from negative (Fortunatov et al., 2014; Yalda et al., 2014) to mostly positive (Prensky, 2012; Berulava, 2012), and optimistic ones. The optimistic position is based on the idea that, under certain conditions, an "extended personality" emerges. This personality positively adapts to the digital environment due to digital competence, technorationalism, openness to change, and self-transcendence. It then acquires digital sociality (Soldatova, Chigarkova, Ilyukhina, 2024; Karabanova, Tikhomandritskaya, Molchanov, 2024; Soldatova, Voyskunsky, 2021; Karabanova, Tikhomandritskaya, Molchanov, 2024). However, having positive experiences of and successfully adapting to the digital environment are not sufficient conditions for developing individuality. If digital devices are introduced in a way that is inadequate from psychological and sociocultural perspectives, there is a high likelihood of irreversible changes to culture, communication, and personality. The deontologization of human life in the virtual world (Polyankina, 2020; Fortunatov, 2014), the anonymity of communication

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[3] For example, since 2008, a group of businessmen (My Generation Foundation) have persistently promoted the foresight project "Childhood — 2030". This project argues that children do not need families and that it would be better to raise them in "children's communities". It also claims that parents do not really love their children and that it would be more profitable to replace them with robot nannies, and children with robot children. Furthermore, it asserts that it is necessary to lay the genetic basis for children to be born in advance, depending on the needs of society and the demands of parents, etc.http://foresight.sfu-kras.ru/node/70. (Radchenko A., Popov S. "Childhood-2030" — the experience of conducting a foresight project in Russia // Educational Policy. 2010. № 5-6 (43–44). https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/detstvo-2030-opyt-provedeniya-forsayt-proekta-v-rossii/viewer).

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provoking aggressive verbal behavior, trolling, and bulling, as well as the desacralization of the system of "traditional" values (Aleynikov et al., 2022, p. 292) are all possible negative consequences that have been identified. Other possible negative consequences include super-connectivity and subjectivity in the absence of the possibility to verify information, problems determining authorship and so on. (Krupennikova, Kurbatov, 2014).

Let us elaborate on the possible negative psychological consequences of digitalization if it is carried out spontaneously, without considering the specifics of the digital environment and how it is managed. The digitalization of human life can result in the restriction of personal freedom and sovereignty, the weakening or erasure of the boundaries of the "self", and the loss of trusting, intimate communication and social sensitivity. This is primarily due to the anonymity of the interacting characters. Anonymity enables one to appear rather than be, to adopt various guises and, eventually, lose one's authenticity and face. This results in the loss of the ability to make decisions and take responsibility. At the same time, modern psychologists, philosophers and cultural anthropologists (e.g. Florenskaya, 2001; Sloterdijk, 2005) have emphasized the importance of closeness, intimacy, emotionally charged interaction, care and sincerity for a person's normal psychological state and children's successful sociocultural development.

The effects of digitalisation may also be evident in cognitive processes, particularly in terms of attention (Firat, 2025). The most obvious and expected consequence is the weakening of memory productivity, since people no longer need to memorize and store information. This results in a primitivization of thought and understanding processes based on the limited information available in the realm of representations in the internal plane. Images impoverished or even distorted by the virtual environment cannot provide adequate material necessary for imagination, creativity and meaning-making to flourish. Thus, the general consequence of "moving"

into the digital world can be a simplification of one's relationships with the outside world and other people, and a poverty of one's inner world, experiences, value system and meanings (Bolshunov, Tyurikov, Bolshunova, 2019).

"Smart home", "smart city", "smart building", and "internet of things" undoubtedly make everyday life easier for people, save resources and facilitate the interaction of information between people. However, Mattern (2021) suggests that a person who is detached from the physical world gradually loses the ability to control it and be a subject in relation to it. The problem of human interaction with social robots and artificial intelligence is also relevant in connection with the above projects. The psychological aspect of the problem stems from the fact that "social robotics begins to give robots the capacity for social interaction" (Motorina, 2023, p. 40), further exacerbating the issue of the decline in human ability for genuine, intimate interpersonal communication and replacing it with simulacra. Substituting genuine human communication, which is associated with the exchange of meanings, experiences and mutual understanding, with imitation of all these things, can lead to humans losing them and significantly changing the parameters of human civilization.

Digitalization has already brought about disturbing changes in human development, particularly among adolescents and young people. One such change is the tendency to transfer the communication features characteristic of virtual environments to reality. In this regard, the reflections of P. Slooterdijk are noteworthy. He distinguishes between two modes of existence: spheres and networks (Slooterdijk, 2010). According to this theory, the network relationships created by digitalization cause people to cease being subjects and become objects of the network. While the 'sphere' (home, family and intimacy) is a relationship of intimacy, people here are open with each other. This makes them "defiantly defenseless" towards each other (Sloterdijk, 2005), creating the conditions for subjective relations in the context of human meaning. Thus,

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in people's lives, society ontologically presents two modes of existence: the subject-oriented (world-oriented, spherological) mode and the object-oriented (network-oriented) mode. Currently, the object-oriented approach is becoming the dominant one, resulting in 'the substitution of subjectivity by agency' (Bolshunov et al., 2019, p. 88). It is important to understand that the modern person's life is shaped by a new digital environment that competes with traditional ways of living and being. This environment changes many things, including habits, attitudes and views of the world and the people around us. It requires new approaches to changed conditions and, most importantly, changes our view of ourselves and our sense of uniqueness in a multitude of manifestations and relationships.

Conclusion

A review of studies on the preservation and development of human individuality in the context of pronounced civilizational changes associated with globalization and digitalization revealed that humanity lacks sufficient experience in organizing a developing digital environment. Consequently, we can conclude that the uncertain and insufficiently researched socio-psychological and socio-cultural consequences of digitalization carry a high risk of destructuralization of the main spheres of human life and of the loss of individuality and subjectivity in relation to the social, socio-cultural, and subjective environment (Bolshunova, Ustinova, 2024).

Civilizational changes raise a number of questions: what are the developmental possibilities of the digital environment; what is the nature of human subjectivity in relation to the digital environment; and what are the negative consequences of digitalization? The most significant problem is developing prevention principles and programs for a digital environment for children of different ages. In the context of the cultural-historical approach and the historical crisis of childhood, the most important problem becomes the study of ways and methods by which adults can mediate the developmental and educational functions of the digital environment, taking into account L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical concept and S.L. Rubinstein's subject-oriented approach (Bolshunova, 2022).

Given the creative potential of digitalization, there is a high likelihood of developing digital co-dependency. This is characterized by toxic traits that manifest as a loss of subjectivity in relation to the digital environment, and deindividualization. Such traits include a deformed image of the self and its boundaries, communication difficulties, particularly in dialogue, and cognitive, emotional, and volitional changes. (Bolshunova, 2022). Special work is needed before digitalization is introduced in education to prevent such changes. Age-appropriate preventive programs should be used from preschool age onwards. They can be used to encourage reflection and model productive relationships with the virtual world in a context that considers value and sense. They can also be used to develop the ability to recognize attempts at manipulation and counteract them (Bolshunova, 2022). Implementing these kinds of programs involves adults fully mediating the introduction of children and adolescents to the digital world. From childhood, it is important to educate people on how to develop constructive relationships with the digital environment, making use of its developmental opportunities while avoiding dangerous interactions and promoting self-knowledge and self-development.

Limitations. As we are at the beginning of this process, there is not enough research on the impact of digitalization on individuality.

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